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ABSTRACT

The Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Network (CECEN) is a city-wide, Title III-funded program in Philadelphia designed to provide: (1) information about already-existing programmatic approaches to early childhood education in the city; and (2) opportunities to begin the development of alternative approaches to staff, parental, and community participation in early childhood education. A District Advisory Council of 16 to 20 parents and professionals guides project activities. Explanation is given of the 3 interconnected components of the project: (1) a district-level information dissemination system; (2) a district-based training program for parents and professionals; and (3) a locally designed monitoring process that evaluates the effectiveness of both the district dissemination and training programs. CECEN provides as well a direct service to children through diagnosis and diagnostic therapy for preschool children with language, speech, and learning disorders. The programs offered include Get Set Day Care; Follow Through; Learning Centers; and special programs for the physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped. A program directory and list of Philadelphia school officials are provided. (KM)

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the comprehensive early childhood education network

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What is CECEN?

CECEN IS...

a city-wide process that is adapted to each district and each "target" school. It attempts to help develop an awareness of educational alternatives in both parents and professionals and to enable them to make intelligent educational decisions concerning programs for children.

CECEN IS...

based on "grass roots" knowledge. It is the cooperative effort of parents and professionals.

CECEN IS...

a seed program. It will hopefully begin, in individuals throughout the city, an enthusiasm for, a knowledge of, and an involvement in the education of young children.

Program goals

The major goals of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Network (CECEN) project are:

1) to provide information about already existing programmatic approaches to early childhood education throughout the city; and

2) to provide opportunities for beginning the development of alternative approaches to staff, parental, and community participation in early childhood education throughout the city.

As a result of the Network (CECEN) program, staff, parents, and community members should be able to:

1) identify instructional alternatives available in early childhood education,

2) relate these program options to the needs of their particular school and community,

3) choose from among the alternatives on the basis of the relationship between them and their needs,

4) increase parent and community participation in schools and classrooms,

5) design effective approaches to parent and community support and influence on early childhood programs.

These goals are to be carried out at the level of each individual district. The project's staff is, in a sense, composed of each district's parent and professional population. CECEN's success is dependent on personal committments from many people. The CECEN base in each of Philadelphia's eight districts, and in the city's Archdiocesan school system (which, for the purposes of the project, is a ninth district), is a District Advisory Council (DAC) composed of 16 to 20 parents and professionals. These DAC's have elected their chairmen from among their non-professional members. They meet at least once a month to guide the project activities in their district. Each council is served by a Network Resource Teacher who is a member of the project's central office staff. The District Advisory Councils are responsible, in conjunction with the District Superintendents, for overseeing the three interconnected components of the project:

a) a district-level information dissemination system.

b) a district-based training program for parents and professionals.

c) a locally designed monitoring process that evaluates the effectiveness of both the district dissemination and training programs.

Each DAC has at least two special education representatives in its membership. Special education programs are considered an integral part of early childhood education by the Network. Therefore, guidelines of the CECEN program stipulate that twenty percent of all funding be used to benefit the teachers and parents of handicapped, retarded educable, trainable, and emotionally distrurbed children.

Dissemination component

Each of the eight local districts of the Philadelphia School System has planned, implemented, and monitored a variety of information dissemination activities that are appropriate to their particular needs. These District Dissemination Plans (DDP's) were designed by the individual District Advisory Councils. Similarly, the Archdiocesan School System of Philadelhia has been directed by its Advisory Committee in establishing information dissemination, training, and monitoring plans. Each district and the Archdiocesan School System have established information centers on early childhood programs. A Program Information and Media Specialist assists the districts in gathering and disseminating information for these centers.

Information available through the centers includes:

1) goals and policies of early childhood programs in the local CECEN target schools, the district, and the school system as a whole;

2) detailed information on early childhood programs in each target school;

3) information on district and city-wide early childhood programs including those programs operating independently of the School District of Philadelphia.

These eight district centers in the Public School System are also the headquarters of the project's four Network Resource Teachers, who are in themselves an information dissemination medium.

Information on "what is happening" in each Philadelphia public and parochial elementary school is, for the first time, available in the form of a series of nine catalogues. These catalogues, which were prepared by the program's Information Writer from information submitted by school principals, have been distributed to every school in the city. These provide parents and community with a knowledge of what is happening in their schools. By informing parents of the programs that directly affect them, these publications may help involve individual parents. At the same time, they are a resource for those parents, teachers, and administrators who want to look closely at a variety of program alternatives in a particular area of early childhood education. For these individuals, the catalogue series can serve as a directory of where to find a specific program.

Information has also been disseminated through District Advisory Councils to the neighborhood residents through community newspapers, pamphlets, flyers, posters, radio, and television.

CECEN news is carried in a bi-monthly newsletter entitled ALL TOGETHER and prepared by the Program Information and Media Specialist.

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Training component

Each district has planned and implemented a District Training Plan (DTP). Each district selected from two to nine "target" schools where training of parents and professionals took place. Most of the schools involved had little or no previous extra funding for special development in the area of early childhood education. Each city school district received direct financial support of between ten and twelve thousand dollars for its target schools' training programs. The Archdiocesan elementary schools have received fifty thousand dollars for over twenty target school training programs. The schedule of the project has been specifically designed so that each district can develop a series of training activities which are related to the district's and each target school's particular needs. These activities reflect the interests and concerns of school personnel and parents who have been stimulated by the information dissemination activities.

Within the program's guidelines, the individual districts are free to develop a wide range of programs and to draw upon a variety of resources in implementing their program. The principal stipulation of the program's guideline is that a minimum of forty percent of all staff development funds are to be spent on the training of parents. These funds are not to be diverted into the purchase of professional or para-professional services.

Sample activities which the DTP's have included are: parental training directed specifically to find ways for parents to supplement the school program in the home, parent and teacher training to increase both parent participation in the classroom and concern for school activities, and training for principals to increase their understanding of and support for early childhood programs. These training programs take the form of discussion sessions in homes, demonstrations in schools, lectures by outside experts, visits to model programs in other schools, and workshops.

Through these plans, parents have entered the schools' programs in new ways. For example, through one training program, the parents of retarded educable children from three schools have received training and worked with their children in the area of consumer education. After attending a workshop where consumer information was presented to the parents, these parents suggested that they prepare shopping lists for their children and send them on class trips to purchase items for home use. Before these trips took place, parents briefed their children on how to be good consumers. The children were accompanied on these trips by both their teachers and parent trainees. As a classroom follow-up to this experience, each of the special education classrooms has been made into a miniature grocery store equipped with a cash register, scales, shelving, and products (which were all supplied by Acme Markets). These stimulating environments are being used by teachers as aids in mathematics, reading, and social studies lessons.

Monitoring component

It is the responsibility of each District Advisory Council to monitor the effectiveness of its district's information dissemination activities and training programs. Some of the kinds of information which the DAC's have been asked to collect include the following:

1) Have the information dissemination activities actually provided teachers, principals and parents with more information about early childhood education and programs?

2) Is the information that has been collected in the **district centers** being used? In the form in which it is presented, is it understandable to parents and members of the professional staff?

3) Have parents, teachers and administrators participated in the District Training Programs?

4) Are there changes planned in the districts for target schools' early childhood programs resulting from the information dissemination and training activities?

5) Do parents and teachers who were participants in training see themselves as potentially more active participants in planning goals, activities, projects, and programs for early childhood education in their children's schools as a result of training?

The central project staff has provided each district with guidelines concerning the type of monitoring information they should collect, but it is the role of the DAC's to design their own method for obtaining the information, to actually collect it themselves, and to present it in a monitoring report. It is consistent with the broadest goals of CECEN that the monitoring function be planned and implemented by the DAC's. By placing this responsibility with the DAC's, parents, teachers and administrators will have the opportunity to work together to develop an effective monitoring component which can serve to contribute to providing improved early childhood education programs in each district.

In addition to the monitoring done by the DAC's, a full-time evaluator has helped write the District Dissemination Plans and the District Training Plans in objective form, and has evaluated the extent to which these objectives and the objectives of the project have been met.

The monitoring component of CECEN should provide the crucial link which will connect all of the activities of this project and facilitate the development of capabilities to plan, implement, evaluate, and then make changes in each district. Thus, this constructive self-evaluation does not have the threatening aspect which is often accompanies such programs. "Learning by doing" has been the key concept in devising monitoring plans. Furthermore, this process encourages parents and professionals to work together for the good of their children, rather than fostering competition and enmity between the two groups.

Direct services to children

The CECEN project does, in one instance only, supply direct services to children. Diagnosis and diagnostic therapy for pre-school children who have language, speech, and learning disorders is being furnished on a clinic basis through the Network at the Special Education Diagnostic and Evaluation Center, 3236 Powelton Avenue. This clinic, operated by the Speech and Hearing Department of the Division of Special Education and funded under Title III, provides thirty children with therapy each year. Twenty-two of these pre-schoolers were referred by the public school districts, and eight were referred by the parochial school district. Half of these children have been diagnosed as retarded; the other half have been diagnosed as intellectually normal. All of the children have receptive and expressive speech levels that are significantly lower than their intelligence levels and have been hampered in their mental, social and psychological growth by their handicaps. Children in therapy attend two sixty minute sessions per week for five months; during and following their treatment, their parents receive follow-up suggestions from the professional staff. Children are aided in the development of the process of auditory, non-verbal, and verbal stimulation, and the development of expressive gesture and verbal language.

Program summary

The Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Network, funded for three years through a Title III grant, began in September, 1971, and was developed as a response to the growth of many new approaches to early childhood education. Today there are 120,000 students in Philadelphia's early childhood education programs (pre-school through fourth grade) who are taught by some 7,400 teachers. Over 13,000 of these children benefit from a wide variety of special early childhood programs being conducted throughout the city. These programs include Get Set Day Care; Follow Through; Learning Centers; and special programs for the physically, mentally, and emotionally handicapped. When one compares the number of pupils and teachers affected by these programs with the total number of students and teachers involved in all early childhood programs, however, it is clear that these special programs are reaching only a few. This project was created as a potential answer to the urgent need to maximize the impact of these special early childhood programs by developing a viable information dissemination and training system. The level of community understanding of, and involvement with, early childhood programs must be greatly increased so that the fullest potential of these alternative programs can be reached. The CECEN project attempts to promote this community participation and dedication.

In this instance, rather than creating a specific project, Title III funding is creating a city-wide process of co-operative parent and professional planning. Through this process, parents and professionals are sitting down together, improving communication, and arriving at mutually agreed upon goals. The difficult and tedious first step of arriving at these jointly acceptable objectives is one of the prime educational tasks of the Comprehensive Early Childhood Education Network. This process is the necessary first step which must be taken before parents, teachers, and administrators can work together in an informed and committed manner to achieve effective educational programs for all children.

Program Directory

COMPREHENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NETWORK OFFICE

School District of Philadelphia
Administration Building, Room B-8
21st and the Parkway
Philadelphia, Pa. 19103

Dr. Harry P. Quinn, Program Director
Peirce Hammond, Program Evaluator
Harriet Pollack, Information Writer
Kenneth Jacobs, Program Information and Media Specialist

NETWORK RESOURCE TEACHERS

Due to the large amount of travel involved in the work of the Network Resource Teachers, the telephone numbers listed below are for locations which will serve as message centers. Calls will usually be returned at a later time.

DISTRICT 1 - Geraldine Wood.....EV7-0567, EV6-0770

DISTRICT 2 - Nora Marx.....DE6-8100, ext. 61

DISTRICT 3 - Geraldine Wood.....DE4-3955

DISTRICT 4 - Lenora Dukes.....TR7-2761

DISTRICT 5 - Nora Marx.....BA6-5131

DISTRICT 6 - Lenora Dukes.....IV2-8140

DISTRICT 7 - Rachel Smart.....JE5-8537, 3171

DISTRICT 8 - Rachel Smart.....NE2-5964

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